



Office of Civil Rights

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TTY USE AND HELPFUL HINTS

General Background

TTYs are communications devices that do not use voice, but have keyboards and visual displays for text-based conversations. While TTYs are used primarily by Deaf, hard of hearing, late deafened, and Deaf-Blind individuals, some individuals with speech disabilities also use them.

English Skills of TTY Users

Deaf TTY users have a broad range of English skills. English is a second language for many Deaf individuals, who may use what seem to be awkward phrases, misspell words (though we all make typos), or “telegraph” thoughts and ideas without using standard English grammar, syntax, or sentence structure. Be respectful and try to use language that the caller will be able to understand – plain English. Just as translating from French to Spanish presents unique challenges, American Sign Language (ASL) and English are not the same languages.

How to Alert Customers and Clients About Your TTY Availability

If your office does not have a TTY, put “TTY Relay: 711” next to your voice telephone numbers in printed materials (program brochures, event flyers, department reports, etc.) If you have a TTY, list that number. TTY availability can be shown with this symbol:



To Make a TTY Call

Call 711 to be connected to the nearest relay service, or call:

1-800-833-6388	TTY
1-800-833-6384	Voice
1-800-833-6385	TeleBraille (Deaf-Blind)
1-800-833-6386	VCO
1-800-833-6388	HCO
1-800-833-6398	Spanish Voice (Spanish translation available upon request)
1-800-833-6399	Spanish TTY
1-877-833-6341	Speech-to-Speech (or Speech-to-Speech VCO)
1-900-646-3323	900 Services

Quick Top 10 of TTY Etiquette

1. Greetings. Answer the call with the same information you would a voice call: “Office of Civil Rights. This is [your name]. How may I help you?” or whatever your office typically uses. It may be appropriate to modify and/or abbreviate your usual greeting.

2. Take turns. Let the other person complete what he or she would like to say, after which the person will type “GA” (Go Ahead) which means it is your turn to type. It is considered rude or disrespectful to start typing or to interrupt before the person has typed “GA”. When you’re finished, type “GA” so the other person knows to respond. This is similar to “over” when communicating by radio — a cue that it’s the other person’s turn.

3. Please hold. Don’t just stop typing when interrupted, leaving the TTY caller wondering where you are. Type “Pls Hd” or “Please Hold” to let the other person know you need to take a break from the conversation. You may even type, “Pls Hd Someone in our office needs help.” When you’ve completed the other business, simply resume typing as it is still your turn in the conversation. Just as with a voice call, you may tell the person who wants to interrupt that you are on a call, and ask him/her to please wait until you are finished. If you are interrupted while the caller is typing, you may break in and type something like “sorry interrupted pls hd”.

4. Take breaks. Turn-taking is an important part of TTY calls. Any conversation can be frustrating if one person goes on and on. In hearing culture, it is acceptable to jump in and express your question or ask for clarification. Because one of the rules of TTY etiquette is to avoid interrupting, it is good practice to be brief and clear, breaking up information you are providing, and allow for questions or comments by the caller along the way.

5. Use common TTY abbreviations.

ABT	about
CD	could
CUZ	because
GA	go ahead (signals turn-taking)
GA TO SK	go ahead, I’m ready to end call
HA HA	laughter
Hmm...	(signals pause ... while thinking)
LV	leave
MSG	message
MTG	meeting
NU or NBR	number
PLS HD	please hold
PLS	please
Q	? (question)
R	are
SK	stop keying, goodbye
SKSK	hanging up
TMW	tomorrow
U	you
UR	you are, your, you’re
WD or WLD	would
XX	signals error, then re-type text correctly

6. Spell out numbers. Numbers can be difficult to read, so many individuals prefer that you spell out numbers to ensure no misunderstandings. If you do choose to use numbers, follow up by spelling them out, for confirmation.

6. Don't worry about spelling errors and don't backspace. Don't worry about everything being perfect. We all make typos, and many of them are close enough that the other person knows what we mean. If your meaning is clear (you typed "new yirk" rather than "new york"), don't worry about making a correction.

If you are relaying important detailed information (name, address, telephone number, etc.), simply type "xx" then restart the word or phrase. For individuals who have vision disabilities in addition to a hearing or speech disability, it can be difficult to track the visual display. It is much simpler for both of you if you continue typing, indicating an error with "xx", then restarting the word or phrase.

7. Don't worry about punctuation. In TTY conversations, it is acceptable to omit upper/lower case letters and to skip many types of punctuation. In part this is due to simple economy, ESL issues, and accepted practices. If your TTY has a printout, you will notice that there is no upper/lower case within each person's part of the conversation. One person's text is in all lower case, and the other person's text is in all upper case. This makes it easier to follow the conversation on the resultant tape.

9. Use inflections. As with e-mail messages, it can be difficult to indicate inflection or emotion with text-based communication. How many of us have felt uncertain about an e-mailer's intent – terse, rude, serious or teasing? With voice telephone conversations, you can "hear" a smile or laugh. In TTY conversations, it is common to type expressions such as "smile" "ha" "grin" or "sigh." Using these expressions, separated in the text by several spaces, allows you to personalize your conversation, provide cues about intent behind words, and help the other person feel more comfortable.

10. Goodbye. When you reached an ending point for the conversation, you may type "GA to SK" or "SK to GA" which indicates "you may Go Ahead, I'm ready to Stop Keying (have nothing more to ask/say). At this point, the individual may say "Thanks for your help. Have a good day. SK" You may type, "You have a good day too. SK" The other person will confirm the end of the conversation by simply repeating "SK." If the person has another question, the conversation will continue.

Depending on the caller, you may go back and forth a few times before you both finally type SK. This is an aspect of Deaf culture that needs to be recognized. Deaf callers are usually quite aware and respectful of hearing culture and they know offices can be busy places; in other words, often, they will modify their own TTY conversational practices to try to fit in with hearing culture/business world communication.

One last note ... relax and don't worry about making mistakes or not doing everything outlined here exactly. Everyone who uses a TTY has different skills and has a lot of experience communicating with hearing folks who are unaccustomed to using TTYs. As you would with anyone who contacts your office, do your best, be respectful and patient, and your TTY conversations will be effective.

About TeleBraille Users

As noted above, TTY users who are deaf and fully blind use a Braille display version of a TTY called “TeleBraille.” A TeleBraille unit works just like a TTY, has a keyboard for input, but uses a Braille display for output (incoming information.) These conversations will take more time because the person cannot simply read a visual display, but must “read” a Braille display on the device.

1. Type slower so the person can more easily keep up. If you’re already a slow typist, this may not be an issue. (Smile)

2. Be patient — wait for a TeleBraille user’s response. Because the caller uses a Braille display, it will take him/her longer to read your part of the conversation – some individuals longer than others. You will notice “delays” in the caller responding to you. Simply wait; do not interrupt (which will be confusing) or type “are you there q” or anything.

3. Use TTY rules of etiquette for TeleBraille calls.

Because the call will take more time and using Braille takes more energy (and there’s no print out which can later be referred to), it is even more important to use abbreviations, take turns, and provide information with breaks to allow for questions and comments.

Why is TTY the Acronym for Text Telephone?

When telecommunications for deaf people started in the mid-1960s, obsolete TeleTypewriters were used to communicate through couplers and telephones. The acronym was TTY, and this terminology became popular among users. In the 1970s, smaller, portable models came out so to distinguish between the large teletypewriters and the lightweight models, a new terminology was created: telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD). As time went by, this second acronym became more of a problem than a solution. One does not have to be deaf to use a “TDD.” The devices make it possible for deaf, hard of hearing, speech disabled, and hearing people to communicate with each other by telephone. It was also confusing that teletypewriters were considered telecommunications devices for the deaf.

Telecommunications for the Deaf, Inc., a not-for-profit organization of consumers active since 1968, conducted a poll on consumer preference for an acronym for text telephones. TTY was selected overwhelmingly! The reasons most often cited were:

1. Signed, TTY is rhythmic to the eye, and it’s easy for hearing people to say.
2. Although the FCC decided to use the term “text telephone” and the acronym “TT,” in sign language, “TT” is embarrassingly similar to the common sign for “toilet.”
3. “TTY” reminds users of the history of adaptive telecommunications, and recognizes historic contributions by the teletypewriter coupler’s deaf inventors to deaf history and culture.